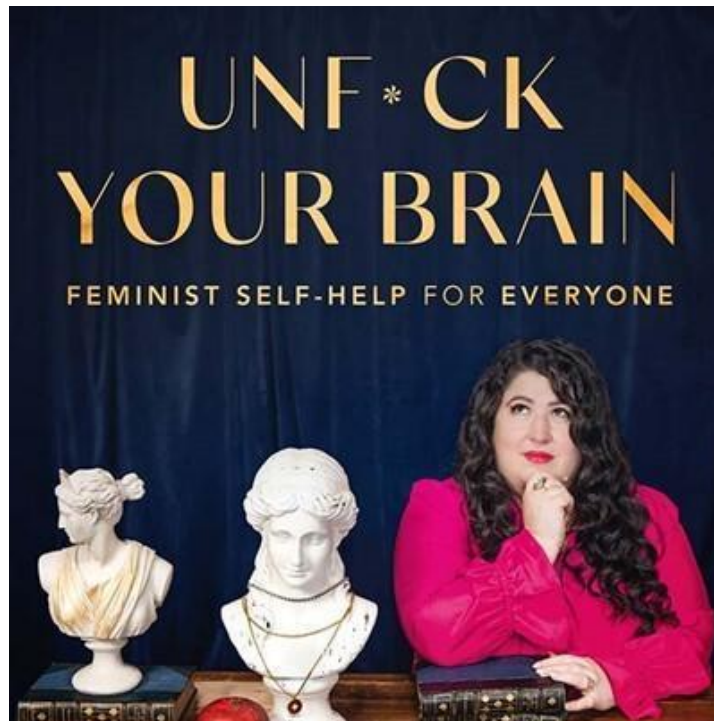


UFYB 202: Self-Worth, Dating, Rejection & Love: A Conversation with Clara Artschwager



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*. I'm your host, Kara Loewentheil, Master Certified Coach and founder of The School of New Feminist Thought. I'm here to help you turn down your anxiety, turn up your confidence, and create a life on your own terms. One that you're truly excited to live. Let's go.

Hello my chickens. You may know, or you may not know that relationship anxiety is a topic that is extremely close to my heart as it is something that I have or did deal with and still occasionally deal with for years. Decades of my life.

It was really an all-consuming part of my mental world for a very long time. And over the years of using coaching to move my attachment patterns from disorganized attachment and anxious disorganized attachment into secure attachment and using thought work really on my relationship with myself and my beliefs about myself, I've really radically transformed this area of my life to the point that I experience very little relationship anxiety now.

And that is, lord, possibly one of the biggest successes thought work has ever had. Because if there was a zero to 100 scale of relationships anxiety, I was probably at 100. I had entire long-term relationships that I was pretty much anxious about the entire time for years.

So it's truly amazing to live on the other side of that. So I want to share that work with you and so I have created something called The Relationship Anxiety Solution. This is a free webinar that I've taught, some of you may have attended it live before.

But we have an amazing recording of the training that you can get for totally free, for zero dollars, zero currency at all. So first of all, check that out. Second of all, listen to this episode. Because in this episode, I am

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having an amazing conversation with my friend Clara Persis, who is - oh my God, now I just got anxiety that I said her name wrong.

I think I did it right. If I did it wrong, please text me Clara. Who is an awesome relationship coach, really a dating coach I would say. And by the way, even if you don't date at all, you might have decided to be single forever, you might be married for 20 years and never going to date again you don't think, you should still listen to this episode.

Because for the same reason that I became friends with Clara, which is that her work is so much about your relationship to yourself and the ways in which you basically heart-block yourself that make dating harder, but then where you think that it's all about the other people.

You think it's that you can't find the right person, or all the people out there are terrible, or people are so flaky, or there's something wrong with you, but in fact, it is so often our own inability to accept and receive love and be vulnerable. We may think that we can, but we can't. Often, we can only accept or receive something like inconsistent affection, or disproportionate, irrational, unhealthy obsession. That's what we think love is.

Her work is so focused on that relationship with yourself. We actually became friends because I friend-stalked her on the internet after seeing her work. I was already working with my own coaches on dating, had made a lot of progress, so it wasn't that I wanted her to be my coach, but there's just so much terrible dating coaching out there that's about how to magnetize your man, and it is always magnetize your man, very heteronormative.

It's so heteronormative, it's often about being in a feminine receptive energy and it's all focused on how to get to the goal. And Clara's really focused on what is the process, what is the relationship with yourself, how

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do you date with conscious integrity, kind of regardless of what outcome you're getting right now.

So that was just music to my ears after reading and being in this space, teaching some of this myself, seeing so much terrible dating coaching. So I loved having this conversation. Every time we get together, we could talk for hours and we could probably have a weekly podcast and never run out of things to talk about.

So I hope you enjoy it, give it a listen, I know you are going to really benefit from this, whether you're dating, not dating, going to date, it's really all about your relationship with yourself.

—

Kara: Alright my chickens, I'm so excited for this conversation. Now, every time I introduce a guest who I have been friends with for six months or six years, I realize that I don't know if I'm saying their name correctly the way I always say it in my head.

When I did the podcast with Jessica Dore, who's my friend, my tarot card reader, I thought her name was Jessica Do-ray for like, the last four years that I've been going to her. So Clara, yes, and then say your last name for us.

Clara: Artschwager.

Kara: Okay, is that what you want to go by for this or...

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Clara: You should go by Clara Artschwager because you're the second person in 24 hours - you actually might know the other person. Megan Heller?

Kara: But if they Google you, aren't they going to want to be looking for Clara Persis? Isn't that what your dating stuff is under?

Clara: My website is claraartschwager.com. For someone who worked in brands for a long time...

Kara: I'm a little upset by this whole conversation. I'm confused by what's happening.

Clara: I know, I'll fix it. Purely for you. I would have fixed it sooner rather than later but I used to have a private handle for a long time, it was a secret account, Clara.Artschwager, and for the life of me I cannot remember the password for that and it's been a whole runaround with Instagram. Every time I do it for 20 minutes and I'm like, I give up. So I haven't - anyway, in short...

Kara: Kind of how some people treat online dating. I feel like we could transition that way.

Clara: We could very easily transition.

Kara: Okay, so Clara Artschwager. Tell us, what do you do? Who are you? Why are you here?

Clara: I'm a conscious dating and relationship coach and I primarily work with women who - it's really refined especially over the pandemic, it's gotten more specific. But women who have a sense of agency pretty much

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in every other area of their life but dating and relationships, or intimacy specifically.

And they've done a pretty solid level of therapeutic or personal development work and they continue to kind of hit this wall. And they're like, I've worked through so many other things in my life, but with dating and relationships, this thing, I can't both wrap my mind around it and engage in it in a way where I feel like I'm making tangible progress and that it actually feels good.

So I use the example of all of these women are highly - I don't think career driven is the right terminology. But they're very driven and successful in their careers, so that's an area of their life when they experience an obstacle, they have a real solid sense of self when it comes to how they will work through that.

And they're very used to having that feeling about themselves and their struggles and their life. And dating tends to be the area, relationships, that they don't feel that way at all. And they're really at a loss in that regard. So I tend to work with them when they've done a bunch of therapy and they're like, what gives?

Kara: That was fun and didn't solve my problem.

Clara: Yeah.

Kara: So we can tell people how we fell in love over the internet. And I actually think we're a perfect story because then we had some confusion, misunderstanding, we worked through it.

Clara: I do know. I was like, oh my God, Kara's so cool.

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Kara: I somehow ended up on - that is not what I was thinking about. I somehow ended up on your email and obviously I see a lot of coaching and now my Facebook feed is all full of coaches. So I see how people are marketing dating coaching and all of that all the time.

And what I really liked about your work was that it was everything else I was seeing was like, here's how to get the ring, here's how to get the proposal, here's how to get the man, or the woman, or whoever. And I felt like yours was the only one that was sort of like, it's not about that. It's about you and your relationship with yourself and how you approach this process. It was so much more process oriented than the result being being in the relationship or getting married or whatever the thing is.

And I feel like that's so refreshing and so missing from the online dating coaching world, which is just so focused on - and of course I'm a coach, I understand there's marketing versus what you do inside, but still, sometimes I think we underestimate our audience and their capacity.

We think we have to be like, okay, I'll get you the husband, and then once you're in here I'll teach you it's about your relationship with yourself. I can actually just tell you the truth upfront, which is that this is about your relationship with yourself and I can still get clients that way and I don't have to dumb it down or promise the concrete result in order to have people wanting to work with me.

I hesitate saying that because then new coaches will have things that are like, discover your inner reclamation butterfly purpose or whatever, and nobody knows what that means. So you do want to be concrete. But I just really love that about your work. I don't remember, I think we started messaging on Instagram as all...

Clara: As all romances.

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Kara: As all romances start, sliding into the Instagram DMs.

Clara: I have never dated someone via Instagram DMs and I've met someone on the subway. So I feel like that's like I need to get to that at some point in life, but yes, we met via Instagram and I was totally intimidated. I was like, oh my God, she's so cool and smart.

And when we first got on the phone, I was like, I'm ready Kara, I'm ready for your mastermind. And you were like, what? And I was like, no, the program, aren't I supposed to be - and you were like, I'm not trying to sell you.

Kara: I didn't even have anything to sell you. I'm not a business coach. I thought we were having a friend date and then you were like - I thought we were having a friend date and then I think you thought we were having a - no, apparently you thought we were having a sales chat. I thought you thought we were having a pick your brain conversation. I was like, I thought she wanted to be friends with me, but we persevered through our miscommunication.

Clara: And then we went shopping.

Kara: And then we're actually friends. And then we went and had lunch and then we went shopping. Enabling my high-level bathing product obsession is really a way to my heart. But it's such an interesting little microcosm of like, we had different ideas or intentions and misunderstood, but we managed to work through it anyway.

Clara: Well, but I feel like that is the thing. I'm sure you have this too in your work where an idea starts to come in and it's just starting to percolate and you're like, something's forming here but I don't know how to speak about it

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just yet. But I see this level of exhaustion and burnout in the realm of online dating, which is translating to a lot of defensiveness and anger.

And I see it in both sides, and I get it. I really get it. But I haven't fully figured out how to talk about that and then how to guide people or at least talk about my own experience and okay, here's why we put down the sword. I get why you're burnt out, I get why you're over this platform, and I do think it's pretty maniacal. I mean, especially in my coaching and in my programs, I'm like, yeah, this is kind of like an online dumpster fire.

Kara: I think one of the things that I have been seeing a lot in myself and working on in this same way is that - so I've been doing all this work with a chronic pain coach and one of the things that we have been doing a lot of work on is spending more time thinking about how is my nervous system reacting to something, which makes it a little more embodied than the way I used to think about it.

And so one of the things that's become clear to me is like, how often that defensiveness in the context of anything, I think I used to have it in business a lot and now I feel pretty secure in business so I don't worry about it so much, but it still shows up in my personal relationships is when I perceive something as a threat.

I just have this nervous system activation. And so there's biological reasons, evolutionary reasons for that, and then those of us who may be people's different childhood circumstances or their nervous system wiring can leave them hyper-sensitive to threat.

But I see that so much even in my successful relationships, just noticing how - relationships that are ongoing and that are healthy and positive for me, but still seeing how often that kind of burnout and that defensiveness

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comes up when I subconsciously perceive something as a threat to the relationship.

And I think it happens to people when they are looking for a relationship and it's like every new person it's like, okay, is this going to be the person? Sort of way too early invested in it. And when they turn out to, whatever, not be, there's this sort of spring back. It's like that over-investment and then the boomerang effect.

Clara: Yeah, I think it's like, are you my person or are you really going to hurt me? And if you're really going to hurt me, my walls are up to begin with.

Kara: And I'll just hurt myself ahead of time to take care of this, let me just beat you to the punch, hurt myself, end it with you, or freak out on you. And then I'll just have taken care of that.

Clara: I get so much like, "I think he's thinking this," and I'm like, unless you had a direct conversation, we have no idea. But yeah, I wish I was better with sports metaphors and is it offense or defense, but whatever. I just feel like...

Kara: It's both though, I think it's both. I think so many women feel like they're on the defense in dating and they don't realize the ways they're on the offense also. The thing that's become the most clear to me as I've worked through this stuff is like, how insanely early previously I thought I had any idea or should know about how a connection was going to develop or whether a relationship was going to work.

Now I'll be six, eight weeks into dating someone and just be like, oh, I'm starting to get to know this person, this is the beginning of getting to know

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them and seeing if a relationship is going to work. Whereas it used to be when I was so desperate to find that partner to validate that I could do it, or there wasn't something wrong with me, it's like I expected to know on the second date. And I thought that I did, but of course it was all my own stuff.

Clara: Yeah, you thought that you did and probably - I always prioritized control. So I would convince myself of like, this person and why this would all work. And I get really creative with them. I remember someone years ago, he was originally from Philly. We hadn't even had a conversation about this but I was like, I could do Philly. And he didn't even...

Kara: I could move to Philly, let me just research some apartments, how hard can it be?

Clara: He hadn't even implied if he wanted to move back there at any point, and I was like, more financially sort of like - I worked in an industry that was higher. I was like, yeah, I could be the breadwinner here and we would work for his schedule. I mean, I wove this whole thing.

Kara: 100%. I was totally looking at Harlem brownstones six months in being like, yeah, he could have his studio in the basement and you know? Have I had a conversation about this with this person about living together? No, I have not.

Clara: So it's interesting, the person I'm dating now and we are at the two-month mark. And I too in the past would have been like, oh, I know everything. No, it's really just starting. But he sent me a link because we're both very - I live in the Hudson Valley now and we're looking at properties and investment properties. We're both into that kind of stuff. How can you invest in something and then have it be a multi-functional property, whatever. So we're constantly sending...

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Kara: This is love late in your 30s.

Clara: This is love late in your...

Kara: You used to send porn links, now it's multi-family properties.

Clara: Yeah, I know. If anyone's 25 they're going to be like, sorry? So he sent something over on the weekend that was like, let's buy it. And I was like, haha, sure. And I know we're both in this sort of joke-y having fun with it zone, but I know that there is a part of me in the past that would have been like, when? Really?

Kara: That's a commitment, right? That's a promise.

Clara: Yeah, I have to do some work about unpacking because I think that people - when you hold those two polarities, it's like, well, just surrender. That language never helps. Getting to that - I mean, I guess I'm curious for you, how you got to that place in your relationship with yourself in order to be at two months and be like, oh, I'm just starting to get to know someone here.

Kara: I mean, I think it's also ongoing. But something just came up for me when you were just talking. What was it? I think it's like, I don't know if this answers your question but it relates to this topic.

When I used to hear advice that was like - I think I used to put a lot of faith in the instant chemistry with someone. It's like, that's what I was looking for and I think a lot of people are looking for that. It's like it should just feel easy right away, it should feel whatever right away.

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And there's various reasons for that. Obviously, there's the romantic comedy element of our society, there's this socialization. But also for those of us, when you are in that place where you're desperate to find somebody, of course, you're just like, yeah, I want to know instantly and maybe if I feel this familiarity or this comfort, that means something.

You're always looking for clues that it's over and you've solved the puzzle. And I think what you hear is the opposite sounds so depressing because when you're in that headspace, when people are like, take your time, you don't always know right away, what you hear is like, oh, I should go out with people I don't like? Or I should settle for someone I'm not into?

And actually, I feel like only the past year or so that I've come to understand like, no, as always, when you're in a crazy mindset, what you think is the other option isn't really what anybody's saying. It's actually this third version that's like, it's not about okay, settle for people you don't like, but it's about having more patience with the process of getting to know someone and not always selecting for people who, like you, have no boundaries, have an immediate...

When you're in that space, somebody else who also wants to tell you all of their - where you have that instant whatever. And I'm not saying that doesn't - sure, you totally meet people who have been married for 60 years and knew the first day.

But it's like, I think the thing - it's almost like dating sobriety. I'm like, the most astounding thing to me about dating sobriety is the difference between how much I used to assume that I knew someone and understood our relationship and understood how the whole thing was going to work and all of that, versus now where I'm like, I barely know this person, I've only known them for six weeks or two months, which is true. You don't really know a person yet.

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Clara: Well it's interesting because when we started and you were talking about how you came across my work and what you've seen in the more - I don't know what the standard version of dating - I feel like the non-dating dating coach, in terms of...

Kara: Yeah, it's like get married this year or whatever.

Clara: Yeah, which I'm like, I can't help you do that.

Kara: I mean, sure, that happens for some people, that's great. But it's a weird goal to set for yourself to me.

Clara: No, it is. And I don't really know if you can really market - I mean, you can sell anything. I don't know, I would wonder about the nature of that relationship that someone ends up in if that's the case. But for me, when I started out, it actually never - both for myself, which inspired this work, and the way I work with women, it was never first and foremost about the relationship.

It was like, I am struggling with dating and dating is so taxing to me, and it's so anxiety-inducing and stressing and I feel like at the mercy of dating apps and this modern dating environment. And so starting with my own experience, I was like, this is miserable. I often tell this story of when I bought my house and I was about to go through renovations and I was interviewing different contractors.

I asked all of these family friends and people, adults, people in their 60s who had been through numerous renovations, and they were all like, well, you're going to hate your contractor, you're going to spend way more money than you want, and you're going to be miserable by the end of it.

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And I was like, well, I'm not saying you're wrong but that sounds like a really awful way to go about spending several hundred thousand dollars. And that's kind of how I felt about dating where I was like, I'm not saying that the apps aren't miserable and slap a happy sticker on it.

I'm like, this was the thing, we've never had more "resources" at our fingertips, people have never been so miserable. So the problem was the initial problem wasn't specifically about relationship and getting into relationship. Obviously, I wanted to meet someone, but it was about how do we mitigate all of this stress and anxiety.

Kara: Don't you think that anxiety, it comes from it being too big a part of your life either way, right? If it's going well, you're ecstatic and everything's amazing, and if it's going poorly, then you're devastated and you're totally anxious.

And to me, it's been a lot of this is a disproportionate part of my brain, amount of brain space to be spending on this. This is having a disproportionate impact on how I feel. To me, that was the kind of - not saying this can't be an important part of your life, but I mean, I use the sobriety metaphor for a lot of things because when you're used to this intoxication of up and down, up and down all the time, which people do in any area, it can be work, or their eating and exercise or whatever, but they're just used to the it's going amazing or it's terrible.

That kind of thing. Dating in a way where you're like, this is a person I like who I spend time with, and that's all that's happening. It is not a disaster that's ruining my life, nor is it a transcendent ticket out of the human experience to everlasting bliss, right?

Clara: It's not?

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Kara: I know, isn't it shocking? It's true. It's so interesting, I think about my last long-term relationship I was in where I had the most positive thoughts about it as I've had of any relationship in person, and I was constantly anxious and miserable.

Because obviously I had a lot of negative thoughts about it, but it was like that was such a powerful example to me of finding the kind of partner that was exactly what I thought I wanted, not in terms of they should be this tall, and have this job, whatever, but just sort of like an equal in all of these ways.

That was what I thought I wanted and that disconnect made me be like, okay, there's more work to be done here. I had done the work to believe I could have the kind of partner I wanted, but I had not done whatever work still needed to be done on how important is this in my life and why. There's something weird going on if my reaction to getting what I want is constant unmitigated anxiety.

Clara: I can help - now you've got anxiety and I'm like, should we talk about attachment theory? Because you so excitedly send - I haven't dipped into the book just yet.

Kara: This book, Polysecure that I'm making everyone I know read.

Clara: I loved it when you were like, I can only read 10 pages at a time because my mind's exploding.

Kara: Yes. Now that I'm on the trauma part, I can read it. Anyway, you say what you're going to say and then...

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Clara: Oh no, I was curious because you were feeling anxious and we have talked before about there's so much pathologizing when it comes to attachment styles in general being one of the main ones of them, and I don't know if you personally identify with an anxious attachment style or an insecure attachment style, and how in the context of that relationship that cropped up.

Kara: I think the anxiety in that relationship we were just talking about was not - some of it may have been attachment stuff but it was also I was actually very attached to the story of that relationship. Attached to it as proof that I had finally solved this problem, found the relationship that I wanted.

And so when you're attached to the story or you think solving the problem means you get a certain outcome in the world as opposed to in you, then you become super attached to it. And I think there was other stuff going on. I mean, we can have a whole other podcast about when is it anxiety, when is it intuition.

There were things going on in that relationship on his end that I think I was subconsciously aware of but the anxiety came from I was unwilling to confront them or call them out because I was so attached to the story about the relationship and to what I was making it mean.

So even though there was this distance or disconnect, that if I had not been attached to the story, I probably would have. So I think the anxiety in that relationship was partly some attachment stuff but a lot of it was created by that. It was noticing something was off, not being willing to talk about it because I was so attached to it.

But in terms of this book, so the thing that I loved about this book and I've talked about attachment theory on the podcast before and one of the things

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I often talk about is the idea that attachment theory, if it doesn't take into account socialization and gender socialization, it's kind of missing part of it.

Because women who have had perfectly secure childhoods may still have what seems like an anxious attachment style if they have really internalized all the socialization about worth and value attaching to a relationship. So I just think it's partial, it's not the whole story.

But I thought her description of - we're not going to go over the whole thing, people can go listen to the episode on attachment theory, but there's anxious preoccupied attachment, which is when you're very anxious about your emotional attachments and when you feel them threatened, you kind of respond with increasing bids for attention or reconnection.

Avoidant attachment, where you are ambivalent about intimacy and you respond to intimacy with desire for distance and avoidance, and then secure attachment, which is the angel's hoorah. I feel like that's part of the problem with the attachment books is they make it sound like if you have secure attachment, you're just happy ever after, as opposed to you're still a human.

Clara: The other thing I get too is people - this is maybe something we can talk about is this scarcity mindset around - because I work with heterosexual women, it tends to be more so around men. But this feeling that all the secure men are - there's limited numbers and if you don't act now...

Kara: Which has nothing to do with attachment. They would think that about - there's not enough men, or there's not enough Jewish men, or there's not enough tall men, whatever the thing is. That's what I hate about that main book everybody loves, Attached, is that they're like, so guess you better find a securely attached person if you ever want to change this.

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I'm like, fuck you. I used to recommend the book, I still do, the Becker-Phelps book, *Insecure in Love* because she takes a mindfulness approach to it and talks about your relationship with yourself. So this book *Polysecure* is this book by - her last name is Fern. I want to say her first name is Jessica. She's a therapist.

And she's talking about - it's sort of a nested model of attachment theory and trauma in polyamorous relationships, but I think anybody benefits from reading it. And I have complicated feelings about the trauma aspect, which we don't really have to go into in this podcast, but she has the best job I've ever seen of describing disorganized attachment, which is when you have some features of anxious and some features of avoidant.

And now I'm even more of a mix because I've done so much work and developed a lot of secure attachment, so now there's elements of all of them. But I always identified with the preoccupation and anxiety, but I was never somebody who would respond to that by increasing attempts to get closer to somebody.

My response has always been the thing I have to guard against is this defensiveness that's like, shut down. It's like, when that anxiety gets activated then I'm like, fuck it, fine, I don't need you.

Clara: I'm like, how can I get smaller?

Kara: Yeah, but it's all internal. The other person may have no idea it's happening. I'll go through a whole cycle where I'm like, in my mind I gave you the silent treatment. And then I calm down and I decided I was talking to you again, and meanwhile you didn't notice at all because it was all in my head.

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She actually talks about that kind of example and so I thought the reason I'm so obsessed with her book is I thought she just did the best job I've seen of describing and understanding disorganized attachment style and where that can come from, which I felt very like, oh, this is what I'm like. Anxious attachment never quite made sense to me because yes, anxiety, but I don't respond in this way at all.

Clara: I haven't read the book yet but I relate to that. I'm like, that sounds like me too.

Kara: Yeah, I think there's a lot of us who are like - there's so much socialization for women around not coming on too strong and not being too intense and whatever, so some of the examples given in anxious attachment books will be like, and when you feel anxious, you call your partner 75 times.

Like, that's not just an attachment issue. If that's what you're doing, we need a deeper mental health intervention. There's a lot in between here and there.

Clara: Yeah, but it makes the women who don't do that so fearful of being too much, coming on too strong, and it's like no, you're actually appearing disinterested.

Kara: Or there's nothing. Now when I look back, I'm like, this is hilarious. I was acting out whole operas of like, feeling rejected and I'm psychically punishing them, which is in my mind, really all that happened was I took 10 minutes longer than usual to respond to a text message. Any of it was happening until I calmed myself down.

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But I do think pairing that with this understanding of seeing things as threats has really just helped me deal with that surge of physical energy that you get when you are - you know when something “triggers” you. Not in the PTSD sense but whatever.

Somebody says something that you take a certain way, or somebody breaks up with you or whatever it is, being able to pair those has just given me a lot more space, especially in relationships where nobody’s breaking up, it’s whatever, I can’t get together that week or can we do this instead or no, whatever. Anything I perceive as rejection.

Having that awareness of okay, I see this as a threat to the relationship, of course it isn’t. My reaction may be a threat to the relationship but this isn’t. Seeing in that paradigm of what am I seeing as a threat has really helped me get that next level of awareness about those reactions.

Clara: Yeah, I think what you’re talking about is so profound and I think a lot of times people think, oh, I have to be impervious to rejection or be that confident or love myself that much that those things won’t hurt me, and that’s the issue.

Kara: That is a big ask.

Clara: Yeah, and that doesn’t sound very human being. And this is another thing that I try to do, which is why I write about my own experience of sitting shoulder to shoulder with people, where it’s like I’ve really just gotten better at managing those reactions within myself and understanding is it about something that’s happening in the present moment or is it about something independent of me.

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And then kind of like what you were talking about earlier in the past relationship where you were like there were certain things that I wasn't willing to bring up to preserve this story, so to speak, and I feel like in this current situation with the person that I'm dating and getting to know, what I'm really working on is each instance - if something comes up and it feels off for me, to have a conversation right then and see how we evolve from there and use that as the marker.

But I think people have this idea that in order to date - I think this is also too why people are like, I'll date in the fall, or I'll date in this season, or I'll date when I get to this is because they feel they have to be all armored up in order to tolerate, when really, I think it's working to manage your nervous system like you are in a way where you're able to not only feel into those things that hurt you but have a system for making sure they don't completely knock you down, but sometimes they very much will.

Kara: I think also for a lot of people, including myself in the beginning, there's a bunch of work that has to happen before I really trust myself to have a conversation every time something comes up. Because when you're over-interpreting for danger, then everything is - let's get together at eight instead of seven turns into a whole thing about how much time you're spending together, they don't want to see you as early. There's such a level of nuttiness that can go on when you're...

Clara: That's such a good phrase. Over-interpreting for danger. I'm stuck on that line.

Kara: Yeah, well I think that's what I'm seeing so much. But it's so interesting because when I was fully in that, I couldn't even see it at all. It's only now having calmed down half or two thirds of the way that I'm like, I have that perspective to be like, oh yeah, I'm just constantly over-interpreting for danger.

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And I think this also - it goes back to something that book Polysecure talks about with disorganized attachment, which is like, because this is something I really identified with is this sort of asking for something feeling very risky, and then if it doesn't get met, having this complete shutdown, which can have to do with whatever, various factors of our past.

And I think for me, one of the things I worked on, even before the last couple of years I noticed, but even before I had this framework I just noticed that if disappointment happened, if I felt disappointed, I made that mean so much. And so I did a lot of work on being like, it's okay to be disappointed.

Without making it mean x, y, z about the relationship and the person and the whatever. Because the way my brain was working, if I felt disappointed, that meant something terrible had happened and something was wrong with the relationship or something was wrong with the person or all of that. And just being able to be like, it's okay sometimes to feel disappointed, it doesn't mean anything was huge in and of itself.

Clara: I just had a conversation about that not in the context of dating but yesterday with a friend, I think it's the same thing where I have felt pretty depleted and burnt out over the last few weeks and I have been on kind of this runaround of I need to get a vacation now and I need to replenish and I need to...

Kara: Got to get that adrenal supplement and then I need...

Clara: Right. And am I sleeping enough? Drink more water, and I ate a hotdog yesterday so that probably was bad.

Kara: Bad hotdog. If you eat a hotdog, that's it, it's over.

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Clara: And she was just like, what if you were just depleted and you just were right now? What if you were just kind of low right now? And I was like, oh, yeah. It was like, once I stopped trying to fix it or make it mean something, or getting all the meaning and that I needed to fix it or remedy it right away, it was like a huge pressure was lifted. But I'm constantly relearning.

Kara: We all are. That's basically like oh, are you resisting your current situation? Then you're suffering. That's just the Buddhist all over, right? Every day, where am I suffering? Oh, I'm resisting.

Clara: I do want to talk about red flags.

Kara: Yes, let's do it. And then I want to talk about texting anxiety.

Clara: My thing with red flags was always my red flags are going to be different than your red flags. I mean, sure, short of someone being an axe murderer, I don't think that you would be like, no, I'm down Clara, you might not be into them but - so my thing was because people are always like, what red flags should I be looking for?

Which to me is the whole - it's a grasping for control. And I think this is what most dating rhetoric or advice pushes is that there is some formula or way to control the system or circumvent pain and rejection. And so to me, people are looking for the 10 red flags and it's like, saw one, not going to work. But to me they're so subjective.

Kara: One of the things we talked about when we had that lunch at that - we were sitting outside in the freezing cold outside that Greek place in Kingston was that I think the whole thing with the red flags is that - I mean,

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this is what I always teach about anything is what we're really worried about is how we're going to think and feel in the future.

So the whole red flag thing, it's not - what we're worried about is that when the relationship ends, we will say to ourselves, "I should have seen it coming, I wasted my time, I should have known." And I see that, that is something I've noticed a huge shift in in myself in the last couple of years also is that much more willingness to just see what unfolds, rather than constantly scanning.

It used to be that if I ever got an inkling that - my anecdotal observation has been that people who are way too effusive before you meet usually end up being flakes. I can't prove this, but people who are just like, already wanting to talk about the kind of relationship you're going to have, probably because they're on their own podcast talking about this problem.

So in the past, if I saw that coming up, I would have this constant internal battle of well, should I just cut this off because I know this is going to happen? Or should I let - and it was always this agitation because at the end of it, if it turned out that I had been right, then I was going to criticize myself. I was going to think I already knew, I did know, I should have done it first or whatever.

And when I let that go, so much more freedom to just let people show up and see what happens, and sometimes you're right and sometimes you're not right. The person that I just started seeing, I totally thought that - I had moments in the beginning because our communication style is very different.

I don't know when this podcast is coming out so who knows what's going to be happening in a few months. You and I are both talking about whoever we're dating now. But where in the past I would totally have assumed that

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they weren't interested or it was over, and it was like no, they just actually had a different pace than I did.

But I think that red flag obsession is just you look to the future and you're going to think I wasted my time, I should have known, I missed something. That was a big one for me, especially if you're somebody who's in the process of "working" on this stuff, you can't see it but I'm making air quotes, when you're "working" on it, I mean obviously you and I are both coaches so we love to work on things.

But there's not more in that framework of I'm working on it, and we need to see progress to convince ourselves that we can make progress and that we're not just broken and unlovable or whatever we think, I think the problem with that is it makes the outcome of any given dating interaction or relationship have way too much weight because then it's like proof.

So for me, the breakup that I went through last year, it 100% was like, okay, I must have missed something. If this didn't turn into my life partner, then something went wrong, I missed something, I should have known it ahead of time, as opposed to we're not fucking wizards. Nobody could have known.

It's not preordained. It's like. You meet somebody, you get to know them, things are happening in your life, things are happening in their life, things are happening in the relationship, and sometimes it goes on and sometimes it ends.

But the red flag, it is that control thing. I think it's like, it's not just control and wanting to know what to do, it's a totally wrong belief that the outcome is certain in a given way, as though it could have been predicted.

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Clara: Yeah, and that your performance in that is then indicative of like, your self-worth or value. But I did this over the summer where I dated someone for two and a half months, and at the end of it, I sat before my coach and was like, ugh, I should have known.

And she was like, it's been 10 weeks. Like, you didn't exactly sit around for five years with this guy. And when you knew, you had a conversation. And I was like, I know, but you know.

Kara: I think that's about the time we had the same conversation about red flags. It is that kind of like, I should have known, as if it was always - it's that magical thinking. There's the right person and everybody else is the wrong person and so you're trying to suss out, is this the right person who's going to be - as though someone could look in a crystal ball and tell you this relationship already is or is not the right one.

Clara: Right. But then that also perpetuates the thinking of there is some way to control this, that there is some larger system. Because it's one thing to say we don't have control, there is no certainty, but another thing to be - because I often think so much about this ecosystem.

This is true of anything, whether it relates to food and dieting or exercise or money, all the things. We're constantly being fed information about how we should go about things, how we should do things, what is the right way.

And even if you're seeing this and hearing this and thinking okay, right, I see the way that red flags would cause me to operate in that way, it's also still really super tempting. It's like the tantalizing piece of cake sitting out where it's like, just because it's there, you'll be more attracted to it.

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Kara: Tell me what you mean, just because the red flags are there you mean?

Clara: I think that people are just - they can consciously on a conscious level be like, I don't want to play games, I know that you can't know things right away. But they'll still be scanning the environment for danger. And then two months in or a month in will be like, oh, see, should have seen it.

Kara: Exactly. So I think what we have to shift from is this idea - it's like we think that fixed mindset of somebody's the right person or the wrong person, the relationship is going to succeed or fail, and it's this weird essentialist, the person before me is either good or bad and that's just a truth intrinsic to them and I should have spotted the things about them.

As opposed to like, you have no idea. The relationship is co-created by both of you and by everything else that's happening in the world at the time. And no one with any crystal ball could say what's going to happen or not. The only problem is that when a relationship ends - and I just like to take it to the absurdity and be like, you're going to marry someone for 15 years, have two kids, have a wonderful relationship, decide to go your separate ways at your 16 because it's run its course and then be like, on the second date he said that thing and I should have known.

Clara: But you'll hear women - I've heard women talk about 30-year marriages that have ended and they will actually kind of say something along those lines. But the other thing too that came up for me when you were describing all that is like, when we approach it in that way, we're actually not really getting to know the person.

Kara: None of this. In all of this way of dating, you know nothing about them because you're not even getting to know them.

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Clara: Right. You're not really present to what's happening, taking them in as a human being. It's more about do they fit into this story or narrative that I've constructed, or the thing that I'm trying to create.

Kara: And you're totally objectifying them, which is so ironic because women will complain and rightly so about feeling sexually objectified but not understand that they're romance objectifying in return, where it's really not about that person and getting to know them. It's about being okay, so in 10 years when we move to Philly then I'll buy the house.

And you haven't even experienced the person as they are, or gotten to know them because you're so single-minded about is this the right candidate, can I put them in this slot?

Clara: Yeah, and I even think about how you and I met and how we had this sort of miscommunication around getting to know one another. Imagine if that were a dating context and two people come together and one person thinks it's a date and the other person doesn't, and then the person that thought it was a date is now hurt and they're like, oh, well I'm never - but I just think so much gets misconstrued and not talked about and then because of that beating heartbreak to the punch, that kind of preemptive let me try and control the situation, we're like okay no, walls up. And we end up cutting people off.

Kara: Yeah, because we've cut ourselves off. Because we don't have that relationship with ourselves, we think there's something wrong with us, or that we're not going to be happy enough with ourselves. And so then we're constantly doing that.

Clara: But that language also, I think people take what I just said there and they're like, well, so I should just settle if they're nice? And I'm like no, that's not what I'm saying either.

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Kara: Totally. But that's what I used to hear too. I'm sure you did too when you didn't really understand it. It's sort of like, it's more like what we're saying is - I don't know if this metaphor makes sense. Often when I'm coaching somebody and they really don't want to feel their negative emotions, they don't understand that they've never felt a negative emotion by itself. All they felt is a negative emotion plus a huge amount of resistance to the negative emotion, which makes it 10 times worse.

And so when somebody who's completely in this - whatever mentality we want to call it, I don't know, desperate dating, not that you feel desperate but just stressful, whatever, so much just anxiety, angst, agitation. When they're in that mindset, it's like everything's so heightened.

So the chemistry of a good date is super heightened, now you're so excited, but then the bad - when everything is so heightened like that, what they hear is we're saying go out with the person that you felt nothing about. And what we're actually saying is your receptor isn't even working yet to accurately experience what's happening in front of you.

Clara: Yeah, and the receptor is - I often talk about a lens, it's like you have on a certain pair of glasses and it's a way of you're perceiving a situation and it's like, it's informed by something that has nothing to do with the person sitting across from you or chatting with you in the app or on FaceTime or whatever it may be.

Kara: Yeah, it's like your whole judgment and experience of it is being influenced by all of this. And so it's more like - an analogy for me would be when I'm like, you don't even know what it feels like to feel sad. It doesn't feel anything like you think it feels like because what you felt is enormous resistance to the sad, so we don't even know what it would be like underneath.

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We don't even know what it would be like - let's say you're interacting with somebody that you have a lot of negative thoughts about. We actually don't know what it would be like for you to interact with them without all those thoughts. Maybe you would love them, maybe not. I don't know, we don't know because there's so much interference.

And that's what I think we're saying. It's not settle. It's not like - it's like they think we're saying and I used to think people were telling me that date you went on that you felt meh about, you should just date them forever and feel meh.

And really, what I think we're trying to say is like, you actually don't know how you would experience that person or anyone else from a different headspace. And when you reach that headspace, you're going to find that these interactions feel different, some meh people are still going to be meh, some meh people may seem actually intriguing now that you're not expecting to fall in love and plan the house in Philly on the first date.

Some people that you thought were really great, you're going to now be like, wow, that person's too much. Your whole engagement system has to be recalibrated. And so I often when I'm coaching about something, I'm like, let's just try it. Let's worry about that when we get there. Let's just try taking down the resistance or let's just try doing it without the self-criticism and let's just see what it's like, and then we can decide.

Clara: I feel like within that texting we mentioned, texting anxiety is a - if there were pillars or elements of that larger thing that was happening, texting would be one of them because the weight that we give and the time I spend on my end, he said this, or someone sends me a screenshot and they're like, I think it means x, y, z. And I'm like, I get why you think that but we actually have no idea. And God, the runaround and the energy...

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Kara: We would all be better off if text messaging was removed from the earth.

Clara: I think so. I mean, I don't know if you know this but this was how I got into this was I trained to become a coach but I never intentionally although I actually think this was all meant to be, but I just had a lot of talk about resistance to being a dating and relationships coach. But I wrote this article for The Cut years ago. It was called - they labeled it Dating Without Texting is the Absolute Best, which was just a clickbait SEO thing.

But it was essentially a story about someone I was seeing and how we decided in the early stages of dating in our relationship to not text. That we would make a plan and that if there was an issue, I could call him and he could call me, vice versa.

And it's not like there was all this commentary - like that podcast U Up, or the Betches, whatever, business. Betches is - I really sound like an older woman when I talk about this. But they were like, that guy's seeing another woman, he's cheating on her, that's why he's not texting. But then it went viral and I really think it's because there was so much anxiety and so much tension around this act.

Kara: Hold on, we have to go back. This is just an indication of how crazy we all are about text messaging. The idea that if somebody isn't constantly texting you, that means they're cheating on you is just so crazy, as if everyone has to be - this is a perfect example.

I remember very distinctly the moment that I realized this and it blew my mind. If you are not thinking there's something wrong with you because your dating life - constantly trying to find the relationship that's going to make you feel good about yourself and totally stress out about whether you'll ever find a partner, you're not as obsessed with your text messages.

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I dated a few people in a row who just didn't text that much and I was in that - I didn't think they were cheating on me. I'm not completely insane. And also I'm usually non-monogamous so it's not cheating. But I was in that making it mean something, and the moment that I realized the amount that I think about texting before I had done this work is not a good barometer for how much a stable person in a good place about dating thinks about texting. It's like we're taking our own insane anxiety and then being like, if someone else isn't as attentive to this medium, that means they don't care. Maybe it means they don't have crazy text anxiety because they have a different set of thoughts about dating.

Clara: Yeah, that they don't care or that they're seeing someone else or they're not interested...

Kara: Right, or maybe it just means they were socialized as a man and so they don't have all of their self-worth tied up in dating or how often they're communicating with them.

Clara: I mean, totally, yes, that. But this crazy thing was after this article, I got emails being like, "Okay, so do you just like not next men at all ever?" I'm like, no, no, don't try to find a rule here. It was just a one off conversation because we were having a conversation about our communication preferences. But it was while I was on the news. I was on the local news in New York. And oh my god, it's so embarrassing, it's like, "Clara Artschwager, who one day hopes to get married, doesn't text with her boyfriend."

Kara: How did we not start with this? Pavel, you might have to edit this into the beginning of the episode.

Clara: I'll send you a clip of it. I have it...

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Kara: This is how I'm going to introduce you from now on. We should redo the intro of this podcast as, "I'm here today with Clara Artschwager who, one day, hopes to get married."

Clara: I mean, it is like pee your pants funny. It's so embarrassing. But really, that warranted – they were like, "Oh, not texting? My word." But I don't know.

Kara: There is so much anxiety control stuff. I had a partner where we didn't text when he was traveling because he traveled to teach a lot and he would get very absorbed. When he taught it was like all-day workshops and dinner with the participants, whatever, he was very involved. And he would do that and I would get stressed out about the texting. But it totally was a control thing. It was this inability to feel secure with myself. And so, this need for constant – not just constant validation. But I think for those of us who have nervous systems that developed to overinterpret for danger, we're always looking for patterns for safety that we can then monitor to see if there's any disruption. And that's what texting becomes for a lot of us if we haven't done the work, is like, this is the thing, this is the barometer I'm going to use to be constantly monitoring for any threat, any danger to the relationship.

Clara: It's so true. And when I go through this with clients, I will have them track, like, one text will come in and they're like, "Oh my god, my anxiety spiked." And I'm like, "Okay, watch for when it goes back down." And it will be like a text later, and it will be like, "I've reached homeostasis," or whatever.

And I'm like, so you see that it's just based on that, when actually the person on the other end of it, like, their feelings, what they're feeling in this whole scenario didn't change at all. It's completely independent of that. But I also want people to have compassion about it because I wrote something

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about how still, the other week, it was something off with the guy I'm seeing. And I just was able to go to bed. I was like, I have a feeling about this. And in the past, oh my god, it would have been chest pains. It would have kept me up. And so, I feel for us all.

Kara: Totally. And we're not here to be like – there's nothing wrong with any of us. This is the point, is that coaching can help with this. But for people who are listening to understand, it's neither that there's something wrong with you and you're crazy. But nor is it that the dudes are always the problem. And sometimes they are, and sometimes you're the problem. And sometimes you're both the problem. And sometimes there's no problem. You just weren't really meant to date for longer than three months. I mean, we could have a whole other podcast about the kind of bizarre probably wedding industry fomented obsession with relationships getting to this certain point. Where I feel like I've had more growth in some of my two-month relationships than I had in my five-year relationships, right?

And I've done more growth in some of those than I think some people have done in 30-year marriages. Like, what's the whole point of the endeavor in the first place? But we'll have to come back for another podcast on that. Is there anything you think – so we're already at an hour and I want to respect your time. Is there anything you feel like people need to know other than what we've shared, before you tell us where we can find you?

Clara: No, I mean, I actually – if we don't have time, and maybe it's a bigger subject, but I was like, maybe we can touch on – because you had said, "I want to hit on relationship anxiety." And I didn't know if you correlated that with the timeline pressure on kids or if that was something different?

Kara: Oh yeah. That is a whole other... we should save that. I think you should come back and we should talk about, like, what's the point of a relationship anyway?

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Clara: I'm glad you said that because that's kind of – listen, I believe in relationships. I believe we are wired for connection and I ultimately want to help people construct a way that is wracked with the least amount of worry and anxiety when it come sot pursuing that on their own terms. But I am at this point where I'm just sort of like this larger obsession that we have. And within my own life, the most bliss and enjoyment I've found in relationship is when I'm actually quite detached from the other person. And it's not some sort of confidence like, "I'm just so much better than him." It's like their behavior doesn't have such an impact on how I view my life.

Kara: Exactly, that goes back to like, this is a person I like and spend time with and have an intimate relationship with, just like I do with my close friends or my family. But it is not the driving determiner of every minute. Alright, we'll have to do another episode about that. That's where we're going. That's the goal. We've diagnosed the problem in this episode, then we'll... so, where can people find you?

Clara: Well, now that we had the whole name discussion but claraartschwager.com, C-L-A-R-A and the last name, A-R-T-S-C-H-W-A-G-E-R... you see what I mean? It's so long.

Kara: Listen, I have Loewentheil, so I've been spelling my name on podcasts for quite a while.

Clara: Okay, so you've got it. And that, I mean, I'm like all the regular internet human beings and I actually have a pretty solid newsletter. I do a lot of writing. So, I wrote a lot of narrative nonfiction. It's like writing embarrassing things about myself on the internet, much to my mother's, you know...

Kara: Chagrin.

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Clara: She's like, really?

Kara: That's nice about a podcast, is your parent's... actually, they can Google it because we have the transcripts. So, go to Clara – see, I've been calling you "Clora". I totally had this wrong.

Clara: Some people call me "Clora"...

Kara: Yeah, but that's not your name. I want to call you by your correct name.

Clara: I like it. I like some people that – anyway, long story short, you can find everything there. And there's freebies. There's stuff on Instagram. You know, it's like the usual.

Kara: You know the drill. She's a coach. Go get on her list.

Clara: I have one on one programs. I have group programs. I have the stuff.

Kara: She's got the stuff. Go get on her list. Read her brilliant writing.

Clara: Thank you.

Kara: Alright, thanks for coming.

Clara: Of course.

Kara: I'm going to see you, like, in three days.

Clara: Yay, alright, bye, my dear.

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